

ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSING

Introduction

The development of nursing work, beyond that expected at entry to practice (generalist) is required to meet the diverse health needs of the Australian community. As health care changes, practice continues to evolve and many practitioners now work in different ways and higher levels of practice.⁽¹⁾ The acceptance of advanced practice nurses within the Australian health care system recognises the structural capacity of nursing to respond to the health care needs of the community at large and promote accessibility to health care. Heartfield believes that nurses and midwives are encouraged ‘...both as individuals and as a professional population, to direct or regulate themselves and their practice within the new and particular definitions and boundaries of advanced, expanded and extended practice.’⁽²⁾

The advanced practice nurse provides a professional framework to develop and monitor the practice of nurses, ensuring that the standards of care delivery remain professionally and socially exceptional. Advanced practice nurses fulfil an essential function within the Australian health care system because they are capable of working interdependently, initiating the care process, as well as in collaboration with other health care professionals.

Definition

Advanced practice nursing defines a level of nursing practice that utilises extended and expanded skills, experience and knowledge in assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation and evaluation of the care required. An advanced practice nurse is a registered nurse who has acquired the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded practice, the features of which are shaped by the context of the health service in which the practice is based. Nurses practising at this level are educationally prepared at post-graduate level and may work in a specialist or generalist capacity. However, the basis of advanced practice is the high degree of knowledge, skill and experience that is applied within the nurse-consumer relationship to achieve optimal outcomes through critical analysis, problem solving and accurate decision-making.⁽³⁾

Advanced practice nursing forms the basis for the role of the nurse practitioner. The nurse practitioner role is an expanded form of advanced practice nursing which is specifically regulated by legislation.⁽⁴⁾ Legislation may allow prescribing and referral, in addition to admitting privileges to health care facilities.

Royal College of Nursing, Australia believes that:

Advanced practice nursing:

- has its genesis in the nurse-consumer relationship rather than specific contexts of practice; and
- is related to a level of practice rather than a specific role so is therefore not restricted to nurses working in particular contexts and having designated roles.

Advanced practice nurses:

- demonstrate mastery in all aspects of care, in evaluating protocols of practice and standards of nursing care including conducting comprehensive advanced assessments of individual, families, and communities;
- use communication, counselling, advocacy and interpersonal skill and knowledge to initiate, develop, and discontinue therapeutic relationships;
- initiate and coordinate intervention, including education for individuals, families and communities for their health protection, health promotion, and disease prevention;
- demonstrate high levels of critical analysis, problem solving and decision making in order to apply and adapt advanced skills in complex and/or unstable environments;
- serve as role models for their colleagues and the community by accepting accountability and responsibility for advanced professional judgement, actions and continued competence;
- utilise research findings, evaluate the quality of research and its relevance to practice, identify gaps in existing knowledge, and initiate and contribute to research to promote evidence-based nursing practice;
- consult with, and provide expert advice to, multidisciplinary committees and other health care providers to advance professional practice and the profession;

- provide leadership by articulating the rationale for innovation in nursing practice and responding to, and advocating for, the needs of the patients/clients and the community;
- engage patients/clients and community in health service planning and delivery;
- should be qualified at Masters degree level with some form of 'grandparenting' provision in the interim for those with graduate level qualifications who demonstrate competence and commitment to continuing professional development;
- undertake regular review of personal practice through peer review and other mechanisms against defined generic standards of competence for advanced practice nurses⁽⁴⁾ with additional specific competencies relevant to the context of practice as necessary;
- should demonstrate commitment to continuing professional development;
- develop a collaborative model of care with medical practitioners and other health professionals;
- include the family, carers or significant others of the patient/client in a plan of care; and
- participate in local and national policy making, in concert with professional organisations, to influence equitable health care and the maintenance of the advanced nursing practice role.

Rationale

Advanced practice nurses are experienced and competent health professionals involved in assessing nursing requirements and making nursing diagnosis for consumers. The clinical practice of the advanced practice nurse is logically derived from a theoretical base, grounded in evidence, and is applicable to health care practice in primary, secondary and tertiary settings in all communities. The role also encompasses the dimensions of education of individuals, families, communities and peers; mentorship; leadership; management and research participation.

Educational preparation for advanced practice nursing is based on an assessment of the competence that is required of nurses to function at an advanced level in either a generalist or specialist capacity.

Royal College of Nursing, Australia recommends:

- national accreditation standards for educational preparation programs for advanced practice;
- the use of the *Competency standards for the advanced nurse*⁽⁵⁾ for assessment of competence by advanced practice nurses; and
- that advanced practice nurses have appropriate professional indemnity cover.

Royal College of Nursing, Australia resolves to:

- disseminate the statement to the profession, government, and other relevant organisations to promote the advanced practice nurse role;
- continue to work at a national level to ensure consistency of educational standards; and
- maintain an active participation in the International Council of Nurses Nurse Practitioner / Advanced Practice Nurse Network.

References

1. Productivity Commission 2005 *Australia's Health Workforce*, Research Paper. Canberra: PC
2. Heartfield M 2006 *Specialisation and Advanced Practice Discussion Paper*, Melbourne: National Nursing and Nursing Education Taskforce
3. International Council of Nurses 2005 *Regulation Terminology*. Retrieved from the world wide web 31 May 2006 <http://icn-apnetwork.org/>
4. Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council 2004 *Nurse Practitioner Standards Project Final Report*, Canberra: ANMC
5. Australian Nursing Federation 1997 *Competency standards for the advanced nurse*. Canberra: ANF

Further Reading

1. International Council of Nurses *Definition and Characteristics of Nurse Practitioner / Advanced Practice Network Role*, retrieved from the world wide web 31 May 2006 <http://icn-apnetwork.org/>
2. International Council of Nurses *Nurse Practitioner / Advanced Practice Network Scope and Standards*, retrieved from the world wide web 31 May 2006 <http://icn-apnetwork.org/>

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MISSION STATEMENT

To benefit the health of the community through promotion and recognition of professional excellence in nursing.

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